

Message Text

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21

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FM AMEMBASSY BAMAKO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2517

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BAMAKO 3945

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TAGS: ALOW, ML, PINS

SUBJ: CRIME AND VIOLENCE IN BAMAKO

REF: BAMAKO 3710

1. REFTEL REPORTED ON THE SHARP INCREASE IN CRIME AND VIOLENCE IN BAMAKO DURING PAST FEW MONTHS. THIS TELEGRAM ELABORATES ON STATEMENT IN REFTEL (WHICH WAS UNCLASSIFIED) TO EFFECT THAT THERE IS GROWING DESPAIR AMONG MALIANS OVER WHAT THEY PERCEIVE TO BE HOPELESSNESS OF THEIR ECONOMIC SITUATION, AND THAT THIS WAS LEADING TO POLITICAL UNREST.

2. THERE IS NO ORGANIZED OUTLET FOR POLITICAL OPPOSITION IN MALI SINCE ALL POLITICAL ACTIVITY IS BANNED OUTRIGHT. BUT THERE IS OPEN TALK BY MALIANS TO AMERICANS, AND WITHIN THE DIPLOMATIC COMMUNITY, OF CORRUPTION IN HIGH PLACES AND OF CONTEMPT FOR THE REGIME. THIS IS SIGNIFICANT BECAUSE MALIANS CONSIDER HONESTY AND PROBITY TO BE NATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS. EXAMPLES:

--THE FORMER MINISTER OF FINANCE, THIEOULE KONATE, WAS RUMORED TO HAVE MADE A FORTUNE FROM THE STATE PEANUT OIL FACTORY BEFORE BEING SACKED LAST SEPTEMBER 24;

--STAGGERING LOSSES IN STATE ENTERPRISES DUE TO

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OVERSTAFFING, EMBEZZLEMENT, AND PATRONAGE;

--THE RELUCTANCE OF THE REMAINING LEBANESE BUSINESSMEN IN BAMAKO TO ACCEPT GOVERNMENT OFFERS OF PARTICIPATION IN STATE ENTERPRISES;

--RUMORS THAT MALIAN INTELLECTUALS ARE TALKING OF A CONFEDERATION OF MALI, GUINEA AND ALGERIA UNDER A MORE RADICAL REGIME IN BAMAKO.

SOME OF THE REMARKS ARE PETTY--THAT FOREIGN MINISTER CISSOKO SPENDS HIS SUNDAYS HUNTING ANTELOPE IN A GAME RESERVE--BUT THEY ILLUSTRATE A PERVASIVE DISENCHANTMENT WITH THE REGIME.

3. WE HAVE BEEN TOLD BY SENIOR OFFICIALS, INCLUDING A CABINET MINISTER AND A DIVISION CHIEF IN THE MFA, THAT MALI'S VOTE AGAINST THE U.S. ON THE PUERTO RICAN ISSUE AT THE U.N. LAST AUGUST WAS A STUPID MISTAKE.

4. THE SINGLE, MOST IMPORTANT, DESTABILIZING FACTOR IS INFLATION; AND THE MILITARY REGIME IS INCREASINGLY IDENTIFIED WITH THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMIC PROBLEMS. AT THE LOW END OF THE SOCIAL SCALE, INFLATION GIVES IMPETUS TO THOSE ON THE FRINGE OF SOCIETY TO MAKE UP LOST WAGES THROUGH CRIME. AT THE UPPER END, EDUCATED AND INFLUENTIAL MALIANS EXHIBIT A POLITICAL RESTLESSNESS THAT WAS NOT EVIDENT WHEN THE THREE-YEAR DROUGHT WAS THE COUNTRY'S OVERRIDING PROBLEM. THE RULING MILITARY COMMITTEE OF NATIONAL LIBERATION, HOWEVER, IS STILL IN FIRM CONTROL. THE MILITARY AND POLICE SHOW NO SIGNS OF DISAFFECTION, AND THERE IS NO OTHER FORCE THAT CAN CHALLENGE THEM. AS ONE MALIAN PUT IT WRYLY, QTE UNLIKE THE U.S., MALIAN CITIZENS ARE NOT ARMED END QTE.

5. THE BASIC PROBLEM HERE IS THAT MALI CANNOT HOPE TO BE SELF-SUFFICIENT ECONOMICALLY FOR A LONG TIME, IF EVER. YET THE GOVERNMENT CONTINUES TO SPEND FAR MORE THAN IT CAN AFFORD, THROWING THE BALANCE OF PAYMENTS DEEPLY INTO DEFICIT. ONLY FOREIGN AID, PARTICULARLY FROM FRANCE THE EC, CANADA, CHINA AND THE U.S.S.R., STAVE OFF ECONOMIC COLLAPSE. US AID IS LARGELY HUMANITARIAN AND ALTHOUGH IT PROVIDES FOOD AND IMPROVED FOOD PRODUCTION, IT HAS A MINIMAL EFFECT ON STATE FINANCES.

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6. GIVEN THE WORSENING ECONOMIC SITUATION AND THE BAN ON POLITICAL ACTIVITY, CRIME AND VIOLENCE IS BECOMING AN INDIRECT MEASURE OF THE POLITICAL SITUATION IN MALI, AND AS SUCH UNLIKELY TO IMPROVE. SINCE FOREIGNERS ARE HIGHLY VISIBLE IN BAMAKO, AND WEALTHY BY LOCAL STANDARDS, THEY WILL CONTINUE TO BE TARGETS FOR CRIMINALS AND MALCONTENTS. AS SUCH, WE DO NOT LOOK FOR AN IMPROVEMENT IN THE SITUATION UNTIL THE OVERALL ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL

CLIMATE IMPROVES.
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